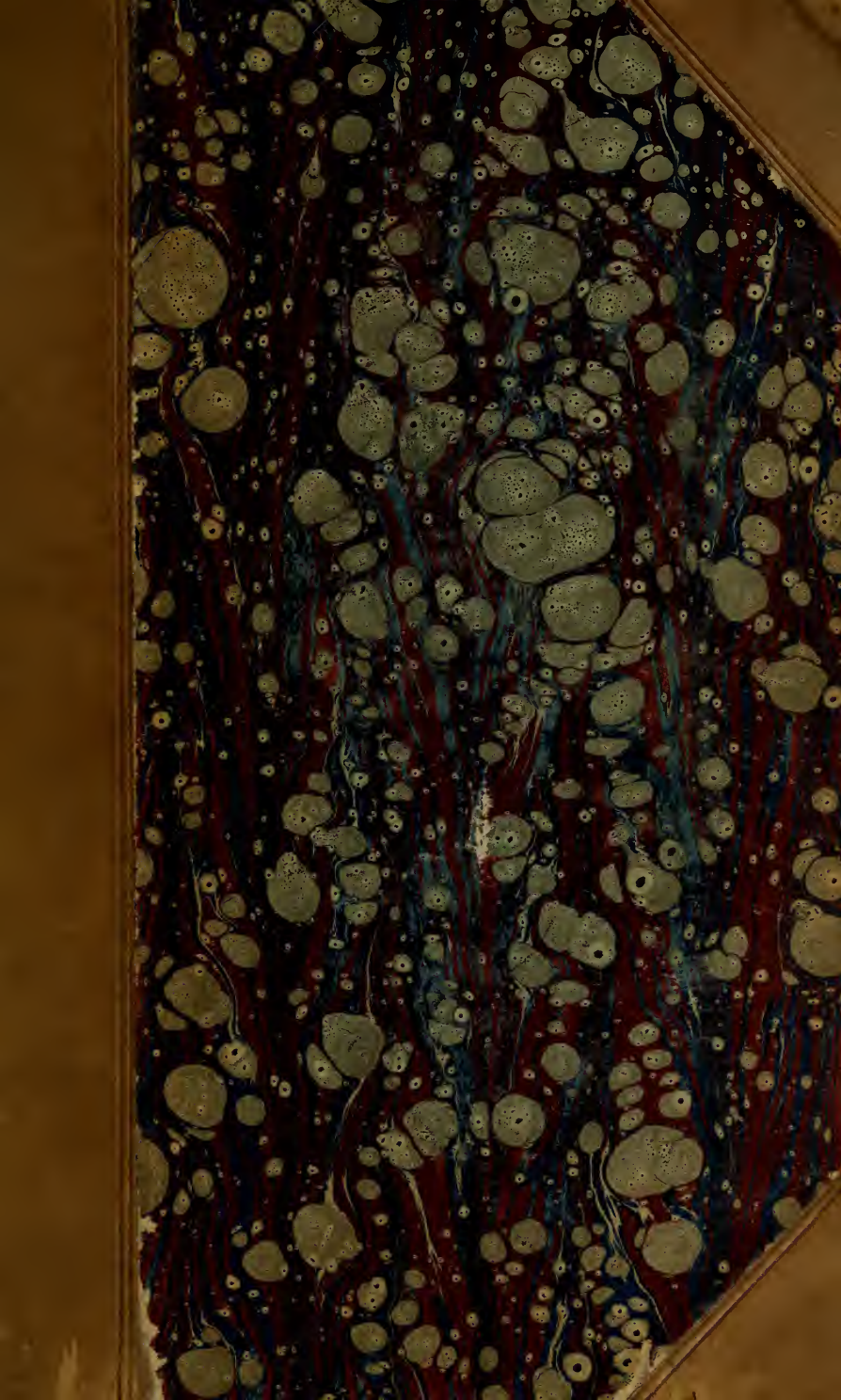




CHURCH SEATS
AND
KNEELING BOARDS

BY
WILLIAM BUTTERFIELD, F.S.A.

WITH AN APPENDIX BY

RICHARD FOSTER

ONE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENTS OF THE INCORPORATED CHURCH BUILDING
SOCIETY

SECOND EDITION

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*The following is the Preface to the First Edition of the
Pamphlet:—*

“TO CHURCH BUILDERS AND CHURCH RENOVATORS.

“I WISH to call attention to the following article by Mr. BUTTERFIELD, which appeared in the *Church Builder* for last month.

“Full-sized Models of the Seats and Kneeling-boards, as illustrated at the end of this paper, can now be seen at the Offices of the INCORPORATED CHURCH BUILDING SOCIETY, No. 2, Dean's Yard, Westminster, on application to the Secretary, during office hours.

“The Society strongly recommends the use of Kneeling-boards, if of well-considered proportions.

“RICHARD FOSTER.

“HOMEWOOD, CHISLEHURST,
August, 1885.”

A second edition being now called for, I am able to give, in an Appendix, communications, which have appeared in the *Church Builder*, from clergymen who have had practical experience of the Seats and Kneeling-boards referred to in this pamphlet.

R. F.

July, 1886.

Church Seats and Kneeling-Boards.

BY WILLIAM BUTTERFIELD, F.S.A.

IN extricating ourselves from the pew system of thirty or forty years since, we have not, I think, shown as much practical sense as Englishmen are usually credited with. We have not grasped definitely the requirements of the case. We have not sufficiently agreed upon any principles, and have too much seemed to suppose that with the abandonment of pew doors all was settled. Pew traditions, in consequence, still survive very largely. I will take one point first, viz. that of kneeling, about which the Prayer Book speaks with no uncertain voice. We are still working in the majority of our rearranged and new Churches upon the pew tradition of hassocks or carpets, at once dirty, clumsy, untidy, and perishable. No protest has been raised against them, even by our Church Building Societies. If anything within the four walls of a Church should aim at an enduring character, it should be that which concerns kneeling. If anything should be provided, equally serviceable for rich and poor, it should be that which concerns kneeling. The hassock and carpet are the rich man's tradition, and they usually mean appropriation. A hassock is a stumbling-block, even to the youngest and most agile, in entering any seat, and it permanently occupies a large piece of the floor, to the great hindrance of standing with ease and comfort. It is always in different stages of decay, raggedness, and nastiness, and in town Churches at least, it harbours vermin. It can never be cleaned. The poor man, as may be seen in any Church where some unusual effort has not been made, is not provided with this article. If provided in one generation, the thing will wear out, and for him may never be replaced. I am speaking from a long and large observation. The hassock or

rug should have ceased to exist, in connection with fixed seats, with our square and other pews.

It is of the first importance that people should learn to abhor anything which is so awkward, perishable, and dirty as a hassock. They must not, however, forget, as some do, that the human body is so constituted that kneeling on the floor for any length of time is not the alternative. Such kneeling strains the joint between the foot and the leg at the point BB in the accompanying drawing. It is not a natural posture for that joint. To most people there would be the further objection that the floor must be dirty. The knee should be lifted about five inches above the floor in kneeling. This allows the foot to remain at a comfortable angle with the leg, and at rest. There is no doubt about this.

A level kneeling-board, five inches off the floor, and three and a half inches wide, is the best and most practical provision for kneeling in connection with fixed seats, and it is of fixed seats that I am writing. This board must *always* be a fixture, and, if kept at a distance of eleven inches from the top-rail of the seat, as shown and figured in the accompanying drawing, it allows the body of a person when kneeling to lean forwards at a convenient and restful angle, and to rest his arms on the capping of the seat-back in front of him. The capping should for this purpose be flattened as shown in the half full-sized section at A, or it will cut the arms. The height of the capping of the seat-back should not be more than fourteen inches above the seat, or the shoulders of the person kneeling and resting his arms upon it will be forced upwards, and will not be at rest.

The height of a seat-back which will meet the case of a person when thus kneeling, is the most suitable and convenient height for him when sitting. It leaves the bones of the shoulders at liberty to move freely above it, as they ought to be able to move, and it supports the spine. There is no need for a sloping back when the shoulders are thus free. Overmuch effort, as it seems to me, has been often made to produce a too easy and lounging seat for Church use. Sitting has been too much first considered, and *then* kneeling. Lounging is not a seemly and reverent

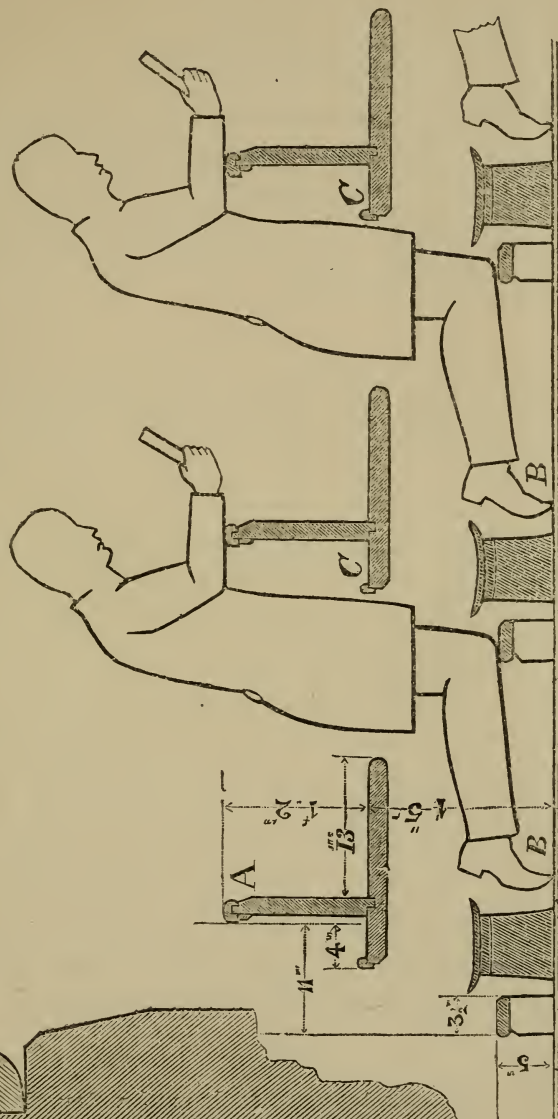
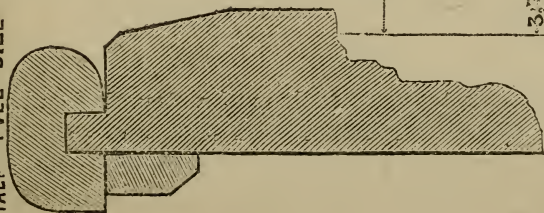
attitude. It destroys all sense of the use and ends for which a Church exists. It is enough, if a Church seat is more easy than an ordinary chair. The old high straight-backed pew framing was absolutely uncomfortable, and yet we all know how people fought to retain it. There is no need to go to the opposite extreme, and pander to what will promote sleep and lethargy, rather than conduct more befitting the place and occasion.

I have shown the hat of each person deposited on the further side of his own kneeling-board, in full view of the person to whom it belongs, and entirely free of the possibility of its being kicked by the person to whom it does *not* belong. People have a habit of tucking in the hat under their own seats, which is an entire mistake. The shelf marked C is intended for books when not in use, and should never be higher than the line of the seat, of which it should be a continuation, or it will come to be misunderstood, and used improperly. In countries where fixed seats obtain, as in Germany and parts of Italy, fixed kneeling-boards, although much too broad, are never absent. Too great breadth in the kneeling-board prevents a person while sitting from passing his feet over and beyond the kneeling-board, which it is often a great relief to do.

I have had to argue for this sort of Church seat and kneeling-board for the last thirty-five years, and I have never failed to convince entirely those for whom I have worked, however much in the first instance they objected to the idea. I am convinced that no other treatment will ever make kneeling general. "*You have made my people kneel,*" is the message I have received after the system has been long enough in use. "*I have become a missionary for your kneeling-boards,*" was written to me by the strongest objector to them that I have ever met with. But it must *never* be forgotten, as it is unfortunately *always* forgotten, that an Englishman does not know *how* to kneel without patient instruction of a very minute kind. Having given him the means of kneeling, he must be taught how to use it without effort, in a simple, unaffected way, keeping his eyes on a book, and not studying the ceiling. The joint in the knee should be brought to fit to the front rounded edge of the kneeling-board,

so as to avoid kneeling on the hard bone of the knee. Many may be disposed to think that the kneeling-board as figured in the accompanying drawing is too narrow. It is, if anything, too wide, wider than ordinary use requires. Pads are absolutely unnecessary. For the purposes of floor cleaning, and for other very good reasons, there should be no divisions carried down to the floor beneath the seats. Such divisions harbour dirt, increase a hundredfold the difficulty of washing a floor, and cramp the legs when a person is sitting. A kneeling-board can be cleaned oftener than the floor, and while people are learning to use them properly, it is desirable they should be often cleaned. We cannot educate the people in Church habits as long as no two Churches are fitted upon the same principle.

CAPPING AT A HALF FULL SIZE



This design shows the Seats as three feet apart, and it is most undesirable that they should be placed closer. The Regulations of the Incorporated Church Building Society are given at page 11.

APPENDIX.

The following communications have appeared during the last twelve months in the pages of the *Church Builder*, the quarterly publication of the Incorporated Church Building Society. These communications are valuable, as they give the experience of clergymen who have Mr. Butterfield's Seats and Kneeling-boards in use in their Churches.

I.

In an account of the rebuilding of the Church of S. Mary the Virgin, Ardleigh, Essex, the Vicar, Canon T. W. Perry, writes :—“Ardleigh Church was furnished throughout with the kneeling-boards and the corresponding seats which Mr. Butterfield recommends. The Vicar gladly avails himself of the opportunity now afforded to express his entire satisfaction with this provision for kneeling. The Church was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of S. Albans on August 9, 1883, so that the experience of two years and a half has enabled the Vicar fairly to judge of the plan: he did not expect that, where square pews and hassocks had fostered a general habit of sitting, open seats and kneeling-boards would in a short time induce a general habit of kneeling; but the practice is growing, and he does not find that the kneeling-boards are pleaded as an excuse by any who desire to kneel. These fixed kneeling-boards have, he considers, the further great advantage of preventing the disorder and untidiness caused by loose kneelers, and they much facilitate the regular and frequent cleanings of the Church. The Vicar has frequently heard commendation of the seats and the kneelers from those who have visited the Church, as well as from parishioners.”

II.

The Vicar of All Hallows, Tottenham, the Rev. Prebendary Wilson, in whose Church Mr. Butterfield's seats and kneeling-boards have been in use for the last ten years, writes thus :—“When these kneeling-boards were being put down in Tottenham

Church, I pleaded with Mr. Butterfield that, as a man advanced in years and of a gouty constitution, I should be allowed what I considered a more tender sort of treatment. He simply asked me to make a trial of the kneeling-board in my choir-seat for a month, with a promise that if, at the end of that time, I was dissatisfied, he would accede to my request. I agreed, and when, at the end of that time, he asked me what my experience had been, I said that it was wholly and entirely favourable to kneeling-boards—that I would have no alteration made, as I had never knelt with so much comfort before in my life. And I say so still.

“I agree with the late Bishop Hamilton, of Salisbury, who said of these kneeling-boards :—‘I have never seen the case of kneeling met before. Mr. Butterfield should take out a patent for this.’”

III.

The Rev. Edgar Hoskins, Rector of S. Gregory by S. Paul, London, speaking of the advantage of Mr. Butterfield’s kneeling-boards over pads, says :—“Pads retain dirt—a very serious thing in our great town Churches—and when the floor of the Church has been washed, the kneeling-pad not only absorbs but retains dampness ; but, besides this, it often happens that the kneeling-pad, which is either placed or hung opposite to the seat, somehow or other finds its way to a place where it is not available for the person for whom it was intended. I have known persons who have come to Church early, appropriate more than one pad, and by this means deprive their neighbour of the use of one.

“I desire, however, to say something from the point of view of the person who is directly responsible for the spiritual welfare of the parishioners. Fixed kneeling-boards assure a clergyman that means of kneeling are provided for all the worshippers in the Church, while the migratory habits of pads make him afraid that when persons want them they will not be able to procure them. Then, again, kneeling-boards do not involve the wear and tear and expense consequent on the use of pads, for it is necessary to arrange these after every service, so that one shall

be provided for every worshipper, as well as for the sake of tidiness. Kneeling-boards are, besides, of a permanent character; and this, I submit is a very important consideration in the matter of poor parishes, and one hardly less worthy of being taken into account in others."

I have not travelled (as I might easily have done) beyond the pages of the *Church Builder* for testimonials in favour of Mr. Butterfield's seats and kneeling-boards. They are to be found in Churches erected and restored by him in all parts of England, and I have his authority for saying that architects have his fullest permission to copy them. I would, however, offer a few words of warning on this subject. I am acquainted with an architect who, having a Church to build where he was instructed to copy these seats, thought he would introduce some improvements into Mr. Butterfield's design for them, and for the kneeling-boards; but the result of the alterations proved so uncomfortable that it was found necessary eventually to restore them to Mr. Butterfield's proportions at a cost of £11. It is, in my opinion, desirable to avoid attempting to improve on a design that has been well considered, and so largely used, and that has given such a widespread practical satisfaction to those who are in earnest about kneeling.

Mr. Butterfield says that one of the bad qualities of hassocks is that they are perishable. It is probably unnecessary to say a word in confirmation of this, but, in order to show that *hassocks do wear out very quickly*, and that in poor parishes it is difficult to get them replaced, I may mention that I recently received from the clergyman of a poor London parish an appeal for a contribution towards purchasing new hassocks; for, he said, "those which were put into the Church two years ago, are all worn out." Mr. Hoskins condemns kneeling-pads: and hassocks are of course worse. One cannot but feel, therefore, with the Incorporated Church Building Society that *kneeling-boards of well-considered proportions are much to be preferred*.

P.S.—The rule of the Incorporated Church Building Society as regards the distance between seats is as follows:—

The distance from the back of one seat to that of the next must depend in great measure on the height of the backs. Where the funds and space admit, convenience will be consulted by adopting a clear width of *three feet*; but a width of not less than *two feet nine inches* from centre to centre will be allowed when the backs are perpendicular; and of not less than *two feet ten inches* from centre to centre when the backs are sloping; and that the height of the back taken from the floor be not less than *two feet six inches*, or more than *two feet ten inches*. If a greater height be adopted, the distance from back to back must be increased one inch at least for every additional inch in height; but under no circumstances must *the height exceed three feet*. There must not be any projecting capping on the top of the backs. Facilities for kneeling in all cases to be provided. The width of the seat boards for adults to be not less than thirteen inches. Seats for children must be twenty-six inches in the clear.

Before adopting any other plan of seats and kneeling-boards, let me beg all Church Builders, Church Renovators, and Church Architects to carefully examine the full-sized models, as illustrated in this pamphlet, at the Offices of the Incorporated Church Building Society; or, if more convenient, attend Divine Service at some Church that has been built or renovated under the care of Mr. Butterfield.

R. F.





